

## Regional Meeting on:

### ***“Occupational Safety and Health in the Arab States”***

**ILO News** - Under the patronage of the Syrian Minister of Labour and Social Affairs H.E. Dr. Diala Al Hajj Aref, the International Labour Organization in collaboration with the Arab Labour Organization Occupational Safety and Health Institute is organizing a tripartite regional meeting on *Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in the Arab States*.

The event will take place in Damascus, Syria, from 18 to 20 November 2007 at *Le Meridien Hotel*. It will involve participation of representatives from governments, business and trade unions from 18 Arab countries.<sup>1</sup> The opening ceremony which will be addressed by H.E. Dr. Diala Al Hajj Aref and by H.E. Mr. Ahmad Lokman, Director-General of the Arab Labour Organization (ALO) will take place on Sunday, 18 November at 9:00 am.

Occupational accidents and diseases are still major causes of injury and death among workers every year with an estimated two million fatalities occurring every year among workers worldwide. It is also estimated that for every case of death, 500 to 2000 work-related injuries take place. Similarly high rates of fatalities and injuries are reported in regions such as the Middle East where 19,000 and more than 14 million work-related fatalities and injuries happen every year respectively.

The meeting aims to review the OSH situation in the Middle East and North Africa, identify priority needs to be addressed at national and regional levels and establish a regional plan of action to improve safety and health at work according to the principles embedded in ILO Conventions Recommendations. Special emphasis will be given to the promotion of a preventative safety culture, reinforcement of labour inspection mechanisms and policy dialogue. In addition to the mobilization of governments, employers' and workers' organizations and encourage collaborative work on occupational safety and health issues, this workshop aims at setting country tailored action plans for developing national OSH policies, systems and programmes involving employers and workers' representatives.

Research recently undertaken by the ILO has shown that countries in the Arab world are facing several challenges and institutional gaps impeding the effective prevention of occupational accidents and diseases. Among these are the lack of resources devoted to OSH, including the provision of services and awareness raising, the low rates of ratification of relevant ILO conventions, a lack of national capacity in training, retraining and further developing the skills of OSH specialists, weaknesses in the labour inspection systems and the absence of clear national which should be informed by sound statistical systems. The limited capacity of national mechanisms involving tripartite actors is also an area of significant concern.

Based on the global trends and emerging issues in the region and in a joint effort to promote safer working conditions in the Arab region, the ILO has taken the initiative to prepare “an overview of the Occupational safety and Health situation in the Arab Region” which will be discussed during the meeting. This study gives an aerial view of the OSH status quo in 18 Arab States. It helps identify the next steps for a harmonized regional strategy rather than unstructured OSH interventions.

---

<sup>1</sup> These include: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen.

The Meeting is aimed at senior OSH experts responsible for policy development and for implementing national policies and programmes. It includes representatives of governments, workers' and employers' organizations.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the specialized agency of the United Nations system devoted to advancing opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Its main aims are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue in handling work-related issues. 181 countries are member States of the ILO.

In promoting social justice, internationally recognized human and labour rights, the organization continues to pursue its founding mission that labour peace is essential to prosperity. The ILO helps advance the creation of decent jobs and the kinds of economic and working conditions that give working people and business people a stake in lasting peace, prosperity and progress.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **KEY GLOBAL STATISTICS ON SAFETY AT WORK**

- Each day, an average of 6,000 people die as a result of work-related accidents or diseases, totalling more than 2.2 million work-related deaths a year. Of these, about 350,000 deaths are from workplace accidents and more than 1.7 million are from work related diseases. In addition, commuting accidents increase the burden with another 158,000 fatal accidents.

- Each year, workers suffer approximately 270 million occupational accidents that lead to absences from work for 3 days or more, and fall victim to some 160 million incidents of work-related disease.
- Approximately 4% of the world's gross domestic product is lost with the cost of injury, death and disease through absence from work, sickness treatment, disability and survivor benefits.
- Hazardous substances kill about 438,000 workers annually, and 10% of all skin cancers are estimated to be attributable to workplace exposure to hazardous substances.
- Asbestos alone claims about 100,000 deaths every year and the figure is rising annually. Although global production of asbestos has fallen since the 1970s, increasing numbers of workers in the USA, Canada, UK, Germany and other industrialized countries are now dying from past exposure to asbestos dust.
- Silicosis – a fatal lung disease caused by exposure to silica dust – still affects tens of millions of workers around the world. In Latin America, 37% of miners have some degree of the disease, rising to 50% among miners aged over 50. In India, over 50% of slate pencil workers and 36% of stonecutters have silicosis.